

**Community**

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mon good.

"I would love to see this become the kind of place where everybody knows each other by name," she said. "I just want this feeling of love to become tangible."

Exodus Pastor Alvin Carlisle, who came to the church in July, says the Neighboring Program is closely aligned with his vision of increasing the small congregation's involvement in the surrounding community.

"She (Owen) had a vision to do some things in the community to kind of create a greater sense of community in the area, so we partnered with her," he said. "...We really want to be that centerpiece in the community where people feel like they can come and belong and fellowship and meet each other."

Roughly two dozen community members came out for the meal, which was supported by donations from a variety of area retailers.

Sharon Jennings, a city native who has lived in the community for over a decade, said she hopes the Neighboring Program will help create a neighborhood that is more reflective of the one she grew up in.

"I would like to see it change back to the old days, when you could leave the house and didn't have to lock the doors and the windows," she said. "Everybody knew each other and everybody raised each other's children."

Though she knows she can't turn back the hands of time, Jennings said building more meaningful relationships within the community would go a long way in bringing that collaborative spirit back to the neighborhood.

Since November, The Neighboring Program has partnered with Pine Grove United Methodist Church's Manna Meals mobile soup kitchen to provide lunch for area residents each Saturday



From left: Exodus Pastor Alvin Carlisle, Minister Mary Moore, John and Morgan Owen and Geraldine Lewis.



Morgan Owen talks with community members.



HandsOn's Michelle Bennett addresses the group.

at Exodus. In addition to providing a much needed service, the program has given Neighboring Program leaders and volunteers a chance to interact with people from the community, said Minister Mary Moore, a longtime Exodus member and regular volunteer with the soup kitchen program.

"I didn't realize we had such a diverse neighborhood until we started giving out soup on Saturday mornings," she confessed. "It's Hispanics, blacks and whites in this neighborhood. I did not know that. It shocked me."

Moore said she was hopeful the soup kitchen effort,

and the dinners, would continue to enjoy diverse participation.

"I'm looking forward to us being able to sit down and be able to cross some of those barriers with the Hispanics so we'll be able to talk to each other and get things done," said the 65 year-old. "...We can show them we care, and that's a good thing."

Community members briefly discussed the results of the survey — which identified the establishment of clean-up efforts, after school programs, computer labs and a lending library as being among some of their biggest needs — at the dinner and

resolved to delve into the logistics of implementation at the February meeting.

Degraffinreaidt said she is thrilled to see the place she calls home beginning to move in a more positive direction.

"I think this is the first step in building a fellowship within the community and gaining that interest in building a community once again," she said of the dinner. "...with building ties to the community, everything grows."

For more information about the Neighboring Program, call 336-724-2866.

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